



How to Find Time to Write

A Damn Fine Words Casual Conversation Interview and Worksheet Package

*brought to you by James Chartrand of [Damn Fine Words](#)
and special guest [Laura Vanderkam](#), author of *168 Hours**

Laura Vanderkam is a time-management expert – at least, that's what she ended up becoming after authoring the book, [168 Hours: You have more time than you think](#).

Her research proved all us time-whining writers wrong: We do have all the time we need to do the activities we want to do.

We just screw it up.

We lie to ourselves, we devalue our activities, we mix up priorities and we waste hours every day of our life. Then we cry that we don't have enough time to write.

Puh-lease.

I sat down with Laura and had a casual conversation about how to find time to write. Together, we debunked mysteries, told it straight and brainstormed several ways people could gather up all the time they need.

We knocked it out of the park. The call was jam packed with advice, time tactics and strategies on how to use the time you have far more wisely than you are right now.

You can [listen to the call by clicking here](#).

And to help you put those time-saving (or should I say life-saving) ideas into action right away, I've put together an action worksheet for you. It includes a summary of the big ideas we spoke of on the call, tasks that help you carve hours out of busy days and some straight talk for you to think over.

Pretty soon, you'll have all the time you need. Because you do have more time than you think.

The Big Idea

This call's main theme was "how to find time to write", but the biggest takeaway message is that your time is a finite resource. Time is limited (literally – you can't live forever!), so you need to use it wisely.

But how do you use time wisely? It's easy. Laura and I both agree that you should:

- Track and assess how you currently spend your time – the truth will surprise you.
- Think about your priorities. Are you lying to yourself about what you say you really want?
- Get strategic. Build a plan that allows you to spend time on your true goals and what you want to achieve.

Ready? Use this worksheet to get started!

Mission #1: Where Did All Your Time Go?

You have 168 hours to spend every week. We all do! There are 24 hours in every day, and there are 7 days in each week. 168 hours gives you plenty of time at your disposal.

So where are you spending those 168 hours right now? The easiest way to figure that out – and you really should – is to track your time. Here's how:

1. Click this link to access Laura's [168 Hours Time Management Worksheet](#).
2. For the next week, track what you're doing every 30 minutes. (It's not hard. Really.)
3. At the end of 7 days, sit back and gape at the page. You'll be surprised to see the truth!

If you feel like cheating by filling in the worksheet in with your best guess because you think you know how much time you're spending... don't. Human beings are incredibly inept at estimating time. We exaggerate and underestimate the time we spend on tasks so horribly that it's almost laughable.

All done? Move on to the next step!

Mission #2: Identify Your Priorities

Most of us set bogus priorities – stuff we think we should want, or stuff we say we really, *really* want... but that "stuff" is actually far off from our true goals.

We lie to ourselves, all the time.

Here's an example: "I'm committed to making this business work!" Then the person spends a half hour on Twitter, an hour on Facebook and dinks around reading blogs.

Some commitment.

Be honest with yourself and what you truly want to accomplish. Think about your *true* goals and set 4 top priorities for the coming month – one for every week. (You can work on accomplishing these priorities in any order, or work on only one each week.)

Write down your top 4 priorities below:

1. Week one: _____
2. Week two: _____
3. Week three: _____
4. Week four: _____

With each priority you set, ask yourself, "Do I really want to achieve this? Is it truly a priority for me?"

Be critical of how you use your time, and question whether the priorities you set are sort of important, truly important or crucially necessary. (Hint: Laundry is not priority #1. Nor is Facebook. Really.)

All set? Move on to the next step.

Mission #3: Identify the Time-wasters

Compare your list of priorities to your Time Management Worksheet. Where are you wasting time? What are you currently spending time on that isn't helping you reach your goals?

What do you need to get rid of?

Write a list of where you're wasting time. Are you self-sabotaging and spending hours on mindless tasks or unimportant activities? Are there temptations leading you off the path to success? (I'm looking at you, Angry Birds...)

Come up with at least five time-wasters you could cut back on. I know they're on that worksheet!

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

All done? Don't despair... now it's time to make the most of your days.

Mission #5: Make It Work FOR You, Not Against You

The clock tends to be an evil reminder of time slipping through our fingers like sand. But it doesn't have to be. You have full control over where you spend your time, and on which activities.

You have all the tools you need: your current 168 Hours worksheet, your list of priorities for the next month and a list of time-wasters you could cut back on to free up countless hours. Let's go to work!

Grab a new blank 168 Hours Time Management Worksheet – you're going to build the next week of your life BEFORE it happens... and that's where the magic begins.

Work out a new schedule, one that reflects healthy life habits (like plenty of sleep, quality time with your family and enough hours to make good meals). Block those crucial hours out and consider them sacred.

Then fill in the gaps with your true priorities and goals. Block out a reasonable amount of time for each, without going crazy. Three 1-hour blocks are more sensible than one 3-hour block. You need some time to relax!

And that's where your extracurricular activities fall in. Schedule in leisure activities you enjoy... just use a timer to stick to the limits and avoid wasting precious minutes.

By the way, this new schedule isn't written in stone. It takes practice to get better at time management, and you'll go through a period of trial and error. Tweak your new schedule as required while you learn this new skill.

Then check out what comes next – it's your prize.

Mission #6: Where's Your Reward?

You've probably heard about the carrot dangled in front of the horse's nose to keep him moving forward. Well, people need carrots too!

Yes, you get a reward. Everyone needs motivation to keep going; otherwise the best-laid plans would just fall to the wayside.

So how will you reward yourself for sticking to your new schedule? You might block out two hours on Saturdays to watch pre-recorded TV show favourites. Or once a month, you might treat yourself to dinner at a restaurant, or a long bath without any distractions. Or maybe you'll pay yourself \$1 for every day you stay on schedule – that adds up!

It's all up to you. Jot down 10 reward ideas:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Remember... blow your schedule and you blow your reward. So make your reward ideas be ones that matter to you. Temptation to slip back into evil habits is strong. Without an even-stronger motivation, you might find yourself saying, "Ech, so what if I don't get \$1 today? This [insert time-waster here] is FUN!"

Worried you'll want help staying on track? The next section gives you everything you need.

Extra Mission-Survival Tips:

Consider this your self-intervention where you honestly look at how you're spending your time... and consider it your wake-up call to get back on track.

But go easy on yourself. Managing time is a learned skill – and one that no one teaches us in school. Those of us who rock out time management weren't born that way; we learned the necessity of time management the HARD way.

Luckily, you don't have to.

1. **Practice estimating time.** Work on improving your skills at being realistic with how long tasks take. For example, start with a car trip you take often – if you guess it's a 15-minute drive, get in your car and test that theory. Remember: Guessing is for hackers. Serious people seek the truth.
2. **Stop and think.** Each new idea, project or activity that jumps up in your life will scream for your attention – and new ideas are bright, shiny, tempting creatures. Learn to stop and assess ideas honestly by asking, "Will this help me reach my goal? Or is it just a distraction that sounds fun but that won't get me anywhere?"
3. **Learn to say no.** No is a very, very powerful word that builds respect... and it's a word that can hand you back more time than you know what to do with. Say no to everything that makes you lose time without giving anything back. Spent time should always be a win-win for everyone involved.
4. **Stop feeling guilty.** Your time is VALUABLE. Biology and human life spans made sure of that! Every hour wasted can't be regained and won't reappear in your life. It's grim, but the truth is that wasted hours are gone forever, and your time is finite and non-renewable. So don't feel guilty when you need to say no to guard your time. It's precious!

Now you have all the tools you need to overhaul your schedule, set priorities and rewards and start using your time wisely for a 168 Hours life revamp that lets you go after your goals.

Enjoy it. Because when you spend time on what matters to you, you'll start achieving the results you want... and you won't believe how good it can feel.

Good luck!